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ABSTRACT

This report discusses the provision of culturally appropriate early childhood programs in Australian Aboriginal language in Australia, and the education of teachers for these programs. The first section of the report examines the education of indigenous peoples in the context of the current Australian education system. Evidence in support of the value of bilingual education is presented. The second section reviews the history of the relation between Australian Aboriginal peoples and European settlers. In the third section, statistics on Aboriginal participation in education and government agencies are presented, and bilingual and teacher education programs are discussed. Early childhood education for Aboriginal peoples is specifically examined in the fourth section. Early childhood programs for Aboriginals and efforts to support early childhood teacher education for Aboriginal teachers in South Australia and the Northern Territory are highlighted. It is concluded that Aboriginal culture can only be fostered through Aboriginal self-determination in education. Appendices include a list of persons and organizations contacted for the report, guidelines for questions asked of these persons and organizations, a description of culturally appropriate education, and notes on Aboriginal early childhood centers. A bibliography of 28 items is provided. (BC)

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Australian Aboriginal Language Early Childhood Education Programmes

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Australian Aboriginal Language Early Childhood Education Programmes

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Executive Summary

of

Australian Aboriginal Language Early Childhood Education Programmes

Australia, like New Zealand, is a racist society. Indigenous peoples in both countries have been alienated from their land and their traditional way of life. Their oppression continues today. Equal educational opportunity remains a distant goal.

The power structures in Australian society are a fundamental causal factor in minority students educational failure. Real progress to meet the educational needs of Aboriginal peoples is only possible by providing for indigenous control of educational resources. Educational initiatives, e.g. the move from "assimilation" to "self-management" have been constrained and undermined by successive governments and their agents.

Aboriginal people have had no significant input into mainstream Australian education. As in the rest of Australia Aboriginal people continue to be largely invisible. They are not found in permanent positions in state Departments of Education or as staff in universities and colleges. Few are teachers in schools and pre-schools even where the children are Aboriginal. Few are students at universities and colleges. Aboriginal people have virtually no control over their own education.

The independent Aboriginal schools have challenged the dominant culture to deliver culturally appropriate educational programmes to meet the needs of indigenous children. Where the states and the Commonwealth have been unable or unwilling to provide them the people have done it themselves.

Although South Australia pioneered Aboriginal early childhood services and teacher education it is in the Northern Territory where exciting initiatives in Aboriginal language early childhood programmes, teacher education and the "Aboriginalisation" of education are now occuring.

There are many difficulties in implementing culturally appropriate education programmes for Aboriginal peoples. For example, the small size of many of the Aboriginal language groups, the choice of language and its orthography, inadequate teacher education resources, print resources, and media air time, a lack of parent/community support; and continuing resistance from policy makers, politicians, and the public.

Government support for Aboriginal education was initiated by Labour governments. Current New Right governments threaten Aboriginal educational goals. There is a strong backlash against affirmative action programmes for Aboriginal people, and continuing discrimination towards Aboriginal peoples by white Australians.

1.Introduction

Aborigines, like other indigenous peoples around the world, are demanding self-determination. They want to maintain and develop their cultures and control the material resources they claim are legitimately theirs. These claims include the demand that their children grow up in an environment which nurtures them within their own culture and allows them access to their world through their own language. Most existing and previous education programmes which have claimed to meet children's needs and the aspirations of their parents and to offer a pathway to adult self-determination have most often been good only in their intentions. Racism, classism and linguicism underlying the programmes have resulted in newer and more sophisticated modes of assimilation.

This report focuses on the provision of culturally appropriate Aboriginal native language early childhood programmes and the education of teachers for these programmes, i.e. those programmes using Aboriginal languages as the medium for teaching and learning within a culturally appropriate environment.[1]

2. Indigenous Peoples' Education.[2]

Schools and early childhood centres are neither neutral nor value free. Their structures and practices are designed to reproduce a particular form of society. In countries where indigenous people are in the minority, for example, in Australia and New Zealand, institutions and the agents of the dominant culture struggle to maintain hegemonic control. Many indigenous peoples have come to believe the myths about themselves articulated by the dominant group. For example, that children's educational opportunities will be improved through "transitional" language programmes. This claim has been shown to be unfounded(Graham 1982). These programmes use the indigenous culture to exploit the native langauge as a bridge to more efficient and complete assimilation to the dominant language and school culture. Critical reflection and rejection of this pervasive ethnocentricity allows indigenous peoples to define their aims for a culturally appropriate education for their children. The following are common to many:

To acknowledge the validity of cultural knowledge and ways of learning,
To enhance self-esteem, cultural pride, identity and self-concept,
To enhance educational outcomes-including maintaining the language,
To meet community needs, parents needs, children's needs,
To educate for self-determination,
To further bicultural and multicultural understanding
and not just
to compensate for disadvantage, or
as a preparation for school, or
to improve attendance, or
to be transitional to the language of the dominant group(assimilative).

The beneficial outcomes of extended teaching through the child's native language have been documented by Jim Cummins, a recognised world authority on bilingual education. The longer a child is exposed to, and taught in his/her first language, the greater are his/her chances of high academic achievement, a positive self-image, and cultural security when a second language is introduced. The native language should be used as the principal medium of instruction througout the early childhood and school years, and culturally appropriate content, materials and methods should be used. The second language can then be progressively introduced from around age 7-8 years until it becomes the more widely used language of instruction, but the

native language continues to play a major role in the school and the community. Generally speaking, at least 5-6 years are needed to achieve mastery of both languages. (Cummins, 1982).

These programmes are advantageous not only to indigeous children but also to other children as well because knowledge of another culture can enrich us both individually and as a society. Children who have successfully experienced bilingual programmes can read and communicate in two languages. There is strong evidence that when their bilingualism is valued and regarded positively, these children often surpass the cognitive, creative, and academic achievements of monolingual children, i.e. bilingualism does not impede the aquisition of academic skills, but may enhance them (Benton,1977; Cummins, 1981).

4. Aboriginal Australia.

The Aboriginal history of Australia since 1788 has been one of invasion, murder, genocide (there are no surviving Tasmanian Aborigines), dispossession, white settlement, and attempted assimilation, or largely displaced and alienated from their tribal homelands and Dreaming sites. Traditionally Aboriginal peoples lived sophisticated lifestyles in a variety of environments. Some were nomadic desert dwellers, while others lived in settlements with dependable food resources by rivers, swamps and estuaries, or on the coast. Peoples of the interior have had much less contact with white Australians than those living nearer the coast. For example, the northern coastal peoples of Arnhem Land had long standing trading relations with peoples from what is now Indonesia, whereas the Pintubi did not meet white Australians until 1932.

A pre-European discovery population of about 1.5 million Aboriginal peoples (Suter,1988) with over 500 different languages were established throughout the continent for 30-40,000 years. The European invasion, disease and violent disputes over land and its resourses rapidly reduced the population. Aborigines, like the Maori, were expected to die out by the 20th century. By 1930 there were only 30,000 people. Current Aboriginal populations are hard to assess. Because of continuing discrimination and persecution many Aboriginal people have attempted to conceal their ethnicity. Official statistics are often only a crude guide to numbers. Recently Aborigines have been more willing to identify themselves and to declare themselves. Statistics have dramatically increased from 160,000 to 228,000 between 1981 and 1986 (Suter, 1988). Aborigines comprise only 1% of the total Australian population.

No treaties were ever made, because Aboriginals were believed to be, and treated as, sub-human. The continent was defined as empty and therefore there were no impediments to its colonisation. It was not until 1967 that Aboriginals become Australian citizens and gained the franchise. In 1987 the Prime Minister, Bob Hawke, called for a "compact of understanding" and in 1988 said he hoped a Treaty would signed by 1990. This was denounced by some Australian Liberals as "apartheid." Currently there is a 20 person "Treaty" working group (10 Aboriginal and 10 non-Aboriginal) with a small public service support group. Their goal by the year 2000 is now being described as a "Reconciliation" rather than a "Treaty."

Aboriginal peoples alienated from their ancestral homelands were placed in "Communities" (formerly missions or reserves) set up by white Australian churches and government agencies where they learned English and/or the local language and often lost their own native language. Many now live in the cities. Most are without land or material resourses, without an identity, a culture, or a language of their own choosing. Poverty and disadvantage affects all aspects of life including

educational opportunity and educational achievement and aid the breakdown of culture and traditions. In spite of this oppression Aboriginal peoples have survived and preserved their distinct world-view. Over the last 15 years there has been a movement out from the "Communities" and back to their ancestral homelands (the "Outstation Movement") following growing political awareness, a lack of confidence in what the communities can now provide, and successful land claims and government recognition and protection of sacred "Dreaming" sites.

Aboriginal holistic cosmology finds support in the green ecological movement in resisting western capitalism. Land disputes, including mining are the most obvious sites of struggle.[3] Another struggle is to preserve, maintain and enhance their indigenous culture and language. The site of struggle for this is the education system.

5. Aboriginal Education.

Although formal education using Aboriginal language as the medium of instruction was started by missionaries in South Australia in 1838, Aboriginal education has been largely ignored by governments until the 1960s when funding began (Watts 1982). Aboriginal people are the most educationally disadvantaged group in Australia (AEP Task Force, 1988). The Australian education system has been responsible for the many so-called "problems" of Aboriginal students. Problems of this type have been described by Jim Cummins (Cummins, J. and T Skutnabb-Kangas 1988) as "manifestations of institutionalised racism, ethnicism, classism, and linguicism in society rather than just educators' lack of sensitivity to students' needs." Cummins argues that the power structures in society must be seen as a fundamental causal factor in minority students' educational failure, and that the interactions between teachers and minority children reflect this power structure.

The 1970s Whitlam government proposed that, wherever appropriate, education should begin in the indigenous language of the children, and that children should be taught by teachers from their own communities. Because there were not enough trained Aboriginal teachers, trained itinerant white teachers were employed to advise and support resident Aboriginal teacher aides. In 1970 there were only 2 Aboriginal university graduates in the whole of Australia. By 1985 there were still only 4% of Aborigines educated beyond third year secondary schooling (age 15). Most Aboriginal Education Programme (AEP) funding is not controlled by Aboriginals. There is still a western agenda. Priorities are decided by white administrators. In the state with the highest proportion of Aboriginal people in Australia (25% of NT's total population, [Suter, 1988]) there is not one Aboriginal person in a permanent position in the Northern Territory Departmentt of Education Head Office, not one permanent Aboriginal staff member in the Northern Territory University (NTU) Faculty of Education, and few Aboriginal teachers in Darwin schools. Aboriginal student numbers at NTU are low because they fail early in courses or those who are eligible don't want to come. There is now a concern that decentralisation and the New Right's lack of support for affirmative action programmes will result in less funding. Classroom support and supervision for newly graduated Aboriginal teachers has already been reduced.

In the early days of bilingual education many thought that translation of the white curriculum into the vernacular would achieve the aims of bilingual education. Subsequently this measure was realised to be quite inadequate and inappropriate. Programmes developed for white children cannot be simply transposed into an Aboriginal community. Successive governments have failed to provide equal opportunites and facilities for Aboriginal students. The dominant white education

system has alienated the Aboriginal child from his/her family and community, and been responsible for Aborigines rejecting their traditional values and way of life. Aborigines are now increasingly rejecting this ethnocentric education system, and want a curriculum to meet their needs. They do not want a bilingual programme with a narrow instrumental view of the use of language as a tool for superficial communication or as a means to aid assimilation (i.e. transitional programmes) but bicultural programmes which provide for the full development of Aboriginal people within their own language and culture and which extend to the knowledge and understanding of the other major Australian culture. Today this is expressed as the need to "Aboriginalise" their education. "Aboriginalisation" of education can refer to the replacement of non-Aboriginal by Aboriginal staff (with non-Aboriginal teachers as facilitators), the introduction of Aboriginal administrative styles and organisation (with non-Aboriginal or Aboriginal staff), Aboriginal curriculum development, and Aboriginal control (Harris, p 9, 1991). Only Aboriginal teachers and parents can provide the appropriate knowledge for their children and by their presence help create a language and cultural environment in which an appropriate education can take place.

There has been considerable controversy over the appropriateness of particular models of bilingual education. Harris(1990) argues for compartmentalising the two cultures as separate domains. He claims that the two cultures are fundamentally opposed and anti-thetical in having different world-views, perceptions of reality and thought paths. This basic incompatibility leads to Harris's concept of "Two-ways" education in which instruction in the two languages and cultures are kept separate. McConvell(1991) and others have challenged Harris's model as a deficit one in which Aboriginal culture is perceived as one without abstract and scientific thought. Harris' critics argue that common elements and a common understanding should be pursued through a two-way exchange of knowledge, or reciprocity, where both cultures are equally respected.

The greatest success in Aboriginal education in recent time has been the promotion of teacher education. The University of South Australia in Adelaide, and Batchelor College, 90 km south of Darwin in the Northern Territory, have become well known for their enclave and remote area (RATE) programmes for Aboriginal teacher education. The development of Aboriginal pedagogies, and community based approaches to teacher education, has been an important feature of the work done by students at Batchelor College (Stewart,1991). Graduates are changing the bilingual programmes in schools. There is more Aboriginal control and the aims are changing from centralised western academic ones to those defined by the Aboriginal community, i.e. for language and cultural maintainance and expression, and self-determination in education.

6. Aboriginal Early Childhood Education.[4]

The Commonwealth (federal) government has traditionally supported Aboriginal pre-school services as a preparation for school and a means of reducing later school difficulties, i.e as "a compensation for educational disadvantage, cumulative deficit and early retardation"(Watts, 1982). Programmes were ethnocentric. The goal was assimilation. The curriculum emphasised school related skills with Aboriginal needs met through independent, i.e. non-integrated, components. Programmes were operating in all states, except Tasmania where there are no surviving indigenes, by the 1970s. However, the 6 programmes described by Teesdale and Whitelaw (1982) are no longer in operation and the scene is now much bleaker (reported by Howard Groome, Nov 1991). By 1986 there were only 16.5% of Aboriginal children under 5 in pre-school programmes (about 5,600 children), there were shortages of trained

staff, inappropriate school buildings and administrative structures, and a frustration that Aboriginal initiatives were terminated by inappropriate white solutions. Today the situation is little changed.

National Policy Guidelines for Early Childhood Education were developed between 1985 and 1988 to provide for the development of appropriate early childhood programmes. They build upon the distinct Aboriginal world-view which still prevails in remote communities in the Northern Territory. Together with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (1989) this should begin to remove many of the remaining obstacles to Aboriginal decision-making and control. The nature of Aboriginal early childhood education (ECE) programmes is increasingly being determined by Aboriginal people.

Although Aboriginal early childhood programmes are provided by government and communities throughout Australia it is only in the Northern Territory that programmes have been designed and implemented to teach through the particular native languages of communities.15% of all Aboriginal peoples live in the NT and make up 25% of the state's population (the highest proportion in any state)[5]. 80% or about 30,000 of these people live in rural communities spread over 1.35 million square kilometres. 16% of these are regular speakers of Aboriginal languages. Many of those languages are in danger of extinction with less than 100 speakers (Gale. 1991).

6.1. Early childhood programmes in South Australia.

South Australia is included in this report because of its historical links with the Northern Territory and because of its pioneering work in Aboriginal ECE. Although SA has had along history of providing early childhood programmes for Aboriginal children, there are no Aboriginal early childhood services or services with Aboriginal children which operate specific native language programmes. This is partly due to the complexities of the language situation in SA. The language of the Kauna whose homelands were the Adelaide region survives only as a written language. Pitjantjatjara, the language of a small number of desert people living in the very remote northern part of SA around Ernabella, has become the most common language and the most widely used in education. It is this language which is most likely to become the lingua franca for education in SA. Many Aboriginal people are attempting to maintain and regain their culture using a language which is not native to the majority of them. This creates all sorts of problems if it is accepted that a native language is an essential cultural vehicle for a people. The extent to which a people can represent and symbolise their culture and fully express their way of life is in question.

6.2. Early childhood teacher education in South Australia.

Aboriginal early childhood teacher education was pioneered in South Australia and by the Kindergarten Union(1978-83) after the discovery that only 8 Aboriginal children were attending SA kindergartens. The programme was developed by the de Lissa Institute at the South Australian College of Advanced Education (now the Magill Campus of the University of South Australia). It is the only early childhood "rural enclave" programme in Australia. i.e. delivered in remote Aboriginal communities (Remote Area Teacher Education=RATE). Centres were set up in Port Lincoln, Port Augusta, Ceduna, Whyalla, and Murray Bridge. By 1990 there were 102 graduates. 26 of these continued their studies to graduate with a Diploma of Teaching(ECE) and 2 with a Certificate in Childcare Studies from colleges of Technical and Further Education (TAFE). Currently there are 40 students in 6

centres. They complete a 14 week full-time orientaion course in the local study centre before entering the Diploma course. The focus is on language and study skills and an introduction to early childhood studies. Students get some experience of working in a number of early childhood settings including junior primary, an introduction to Aboriginal studies, and personal and professional development. Attrition rates during orientation are extremely high, but once on the Diploma course they are fairly low. Selection is conducted in the student's community and involves an information sharing session with the candidate, a current student, a graduate, a community representative, a clinical psychologist, and a university staff member. Assessment is aimed at demonstrating the same standards as in mainstream programmes but with flexibility to accommodate culturally appropriate methods. Prior learning assesssment is permitted but not formalised. This programme is now under threat through funding cuts even though the Aboriginal Education Policy Taskforce recommendations suggested that this type of programme has the full support of Aboriginal education policy makers. Future funding may come through the newly created university Faculties of Education or Aboriginal Studies. The de Lissa Institute's Aboriginal programme is soon to face the dilemma of choosing to join a faculty which could mean a loss of control over the programme as well as restrictions which has to date been autonomous within the de Lissa Institute.

6.3 Early childhood programmes in the Northern Territory.

In the Northern Territory the Dept of Education is responsible for pre-schools (children age 3-5) which are formally attached to schools. Childcare programs are administered by the Department of Community Development. ECE programmess are separate from childcare programs for the purposes of funding and administration in Australia. Pre-school education has traditionally been funded by state governments and childcare by the Commonwealth or federal government. Before the NT became self-governing in the 1970s there were 2 separate education systems, one responsible for schools on Aboriginal missions and settlements (The Education Branch of the Welfare Division of the Commonwealth Department of the Interior) and the other for white children's schooling and part-Aboriginal and de-tribalised children (NT Education Branch of the Commonwealth Office of Education)(Teasdale and Whitelaw 1981).

Significant developments in Aboriginal pre-schools in the NT were reported in the early 1980s (McConnochie and Russell, 1982). There was "an emphasis on consolidation of the child's first language, encouragement of strong cultural identity, increasing emphasis on traditional patterns of communication and adult-child interaction, and an increasing use of culturally and geographically appropriate teaching and learning styles" (p127). Aboriginal staff were involved in planning and implementation. There was "a move away from spatial, temporal and authority structures of the western pre-schools towards a form of pre-schooling more consistant with Aboriginal culture and ideals." But there was still a shortage of appropriately trained Aboriginal teachers, pre-school buildings, and administrative structures (p128).

Today 21 NT schools are operating bilingual programmes and probably have, or are considering setting up, bilingual pre-schools (Harris, 1991). There are also bilingual childcare programmes. However, there are still shortages of trained Aboriginal teachers, appropriate curricula, buildings, Aboriginal administrative structures, and limited Aboriginal community control. These programmes are unlikely to provide for the Aboriginal community's needs until "Aboriginalised."

From my visits to state and independent pre-schools and childcare centres with native language programs catering for Aboriginal children in the NT (in Alice Springs, Barunga near Katherine and at Batchelor) and interviews with Aboriginal teacher educators and Aboriginal education researchers, I have serious concerns that practice falls far short of the policy guidelines. I observed decision making and control still firmly in white Australian hands, the use of a white Australian curriculum, even though the programs were conducted using native languages. In some centres 5 different Aboriginal languages were in use at the same time. Nevertheless, there are still shortages of trained Aboriginal teachers, and inappropriate buildings .

6.4 Early childhood teacher education in the Northern Territory.

Northern Territory University (formerly the Darwin College of Advanced Education) is the only institution in the NT which currently offers an early childhood teacher education course. This is not a specialist Aboriginal programme. Batchelor College is currently introducing a range of courses designed to meet the needs of Aboriginal people, and is developing the first Aboriginal EC course for "remote area", "tradition-oriented" Aboriginal communities in partnership with those communities. The new courses have been structured to facilitate and support the direct involvement of the Aboriginal communities to ensure that "the curriculum,... mode of delivery and pedagogical orientation" (Stewart, 1991, p 19) is appropriate. Through fostering a critical awareness Aboriginal people are becoming empowered as competent teachers, and community leaders. Emancipatory interest is leading to Aboriginal self-determination and self-management. In this way Aboriginal teacher education is contributing to Aboriginal advancement and community development. Aboriginal people are achieving control of their own community schools and early childhood programmes and making decisions about the role of schooling and education. This directly supports language maintainance and cultural survival. Progress is slow with the East Arnhem communities having made the most extensive developments in Aboriginalisation.

The Batchelor College early childhood co-ordinator has organised a series of workshops to gather information about the peoples' needs. It is likely that the successful RATE model of the type already in use for primary may well be the preferred choice. This model has lecturers/tutors based in remote centres with groups of 16-20 students. Students come into the college for 1 or 2 weeks each year. Students are funded by the federal Dept of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) except in their foundation year when they receive TAFE funding. Students are visited on practicum by National Aboriginal Education Programme(NAEP) tutors. Reductions in the college's budget has raised concerns about the future of these courses. A major cost is for travel between the college and the remote locations. The proposed pilot early childhood programme will take 10 full-time students over 4 years and 20 part-time students over 9 years maximum for the Diploma in Teaching (ECE). "Advanced Standing" and "prior learning" will be taken into account, and fast-tracking will be available.

7. Conclusion.

From my survey of reports on Aboriginal early childhood education, observations of early childhood programmes in three Northern Territory districts and interviews with their centre teachers and administrators, and with teacher educators and academics in South Australia and the Northern Territory I conclude that the future for culturally appropriate Aboriginal early childhood education remains bleak. There are a few exciting innovations where Aboriginal peoples are determining the nature of their children's education. But transitional programmes, and other programmes with culturally inappropriate pedagogies and curricula are commonplace. Aboriginal parents still distrust "school" and see it as a necessary evil. They remain concerned about the effects of western schooling on their children and on their culture and traditions.

Government support for indigenous people's education was initiated and extended by Labour governments. The New Right's racist opposition to affirmative action will jeopardise future funding both at state and federal levels. Aboriginal peoples may again be left with few resources for their development.

Although there are many difficulties in providing culturally appropriate programmes, their educational and social benefits have been clearly demonstated and documented. It is in children's early years when the foundations of consciousness and identity are being formed that some of the more insidious aspects of westernization are experienced. The socialisation and education of Aboriginal children must be given back to Aboriginal communities. The fostering, maintainance and enhancement of Aboriginal culture can only be guaranteed through genuine self-determination in education. Aboriginalisation should be seen as appropriate, just and desirable. It will benefit all Australians.

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[1] Refer Appendix 3.

[2] I am using three criteria to define "indigenous"- to have indigenous ancestry, to identify as an indigenous person, and to be accepted by an indigenous community. This concept of "indigenous" has been developed to further the legitimacy of the peoples' claims for recognition and resources on nation states. It is a politically contested category as well as a descriptive term.

[3] Many indigenous people's have an intimate conservationist relationship with the Earth and a special relationship with the land they and their ancesters come from. They see themselves as trustees and protectors of the land and its resources.This can be compared to the western theological concept of "ground of being" -an intimate relationship of people to their essential nature. In practice, many western nations have abused and wasted their land and the lands of many colonised indigenous peoples. The western concept of "freedom" to exploit resources to the limits of exhaustion and to buy and sell the products of this exploitative relationship in the marketplace is seen as a gross violation of "mother nature" to indigenous peoples who do not claim ownership of parts of the natural world but guardianship of the whole Earth.

[4] Early Childhood Education (ECE) programmes are defined as those serving children from birth to 8 years, although in practice the focus is often on 0-5 years. In Australia "childcare" is not usually included in "Early Childhood" for policy, administration and funding purposes.

[5] 15% of Aborigines live in the NT, 25% in Queensland, 25% in NSW,17% in WA, and 7% in SA .

Appendix 1:

Interviewees and/or resources obtained from

Dr Trevor Feeder, Co-ordinator, Aboriginal Early Childhood Education Programme. de Lissa Institute, Magill Campus, University of South Australia.

Dr Howard Groome, Lecturer in Aboriginal Education, Underhill Campus, University of South Australia, SA 5032.

Marie Davis, Deputy Principal, and teachers in the childcare centre at Yipirinya School, Alice Springs, NT.

Robert Hoogenraad, Institute for Aboriginal Development, PO Box 1507, Alice Springs, NT 0871.

Des Barritt, Senior Teacher, Primary School, and pre-school teachers at Barunga Community Education Centre(CEC), Barunga, Katherine, NT 0851.

Dr Stephen Harris, Casuarina Campus, Northern Territory University, NT 8011.

Jan Powick, Dr Ian Stewart, and teachers in the childcare centre and kindergarten at Batchelor College, Batchelor, NT. Batchelor College.

Margaret Sharpe, Dept of Aboriginal and Multicultural Studies, University of New England, Armidale, NSW 2351.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Unit, Queensland University of Technology Red Hill, Q 4059.

Australian Council for Educational Research Limited, PO Box 210, Hawthor, Vic 3122.

Australian Dept of Employment Education and Training.

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, GPO Box 553, Canberra, ACT 2601.

Batchelor College, School of Education Studies, Batchelor, NT 0843.

National Aboriginal Education Committee, PO Box 9880, Braddon, Canberra, ACT 2601.

Northern Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, PO Box 4821, Darwin, NT.

Northern Territory Dept of Education, Darwin Region, NT 0800, and Alice Springs Region, NT 0870.

New Zealand Ministry of Education, Wellington.

Appendix 2:

Guidelines for questions and areas for questioning about the provision of Aboriginal early childhood (AEC) services and teacher education (including those which use vernacular as the medium of instruction).

1. The philosophy and aims of of Aboriginal education(compensatory- to avoid later problems at school [-ve, deficit view], as a prep for school[+ve, "Head-Start", for native language aquisition/maintainance, cultural pride, affirmation, education for self-determination, political power...)

2. The funding situation developments in AEC. Affirmative action/equity. Effects of government policies.

3. Philosophy, descriptions and organisation including mode of delivery (pre-service and in-service, campus and off-campus remote area [RATE]) and teaching.

4. Methods and assessment of AEC teacher education programmes financial or other incentives or training places reserved for Aboriginal student teachers

5. The effects of other government policy on AEC teachers, centres and their operation.(The "New Right" or "laissez-faire" or Treasury "new mandarin" market dominated economy)

6. The effects of the recent transition/amalgamations of colleges into universities on those working in the AEC field.

7. Do you have any mutual arrangements with other EC organisations in NZ for the exchange of information and/or publications? (e.g. TKR National Trust?)

8. Early Childhood programme development in recent time. (Threats to the distinct nature/DAP/culturally appropriateness of AEC curriculum?)

Appendix 3:

Culturally Appropriate Education.

The importance of early childhood education to the social and educational development of young children is well recognised in most societies. It is especially beneficial for those children with any sort of disadvantage, for example, most indigenous minority children (because of poverty, poor health and nutrition, racism, and cultural alienation). To be effective the early childhood centre curriculum needs to be compatible with the child's family culture. If this is not so children have to cope with a strange and sometimes hostile environment. Programs need to foster and respect indigenous culture, the values, attitudes, rituals and other practices, special use of environments, and the knowledge and experiences children bring with them to the programs. Teachers, parents and the wider community should be involved in the planning and management of programmes.

To be culturally appropriate a programme must adopt learning processes which optimise learning within that culture. Indigenous educational philosophies of practice may not be recognisable from an alternative cultural perspective. Methods of instruction may only be revealed as complex and sophisticated when analysed and understood within the cultural context. It is too easy to trivialise a rich form of learning if the relationship between the learning and the cultural aims and objectives are not understood. An oral culture traditionally relies on memory. For example, the importance of formal and public speaking, the building of self-esteem and the memorisation of genealogical and historical records within a oral culture may necessitate teaching methods qualitatively different from those used within dominant western educational philosophies.

Western thought is often closed by the assumption that it is intellectually superior. This leads to descriptions of indigenous thought as "pre-logical" or "pre-philosophical" or "non-abstract." It is often assumed that there is no Maori maths, or Aboriginal science, or Navajo theory of cognitive development. What each indigenous culture does have is its own ontology, epistemology and rationality to which other people may not have easy access. It cannot be assumed that so-called universal theories and the practices based upon them, e.g. a Piagetian theory of cognitive development or an Eriksonian theory of social and emotional development, are appropriate, should be, or can be used to support a program or to attempt to understand indigenous children's development. Alternative processes of learning need to be acknowledged, respected and validated.

Appendix 4:

Notes on Aboriginal early childhood centres visited.

Yipirinya Aboriginal School is a unique independent primary school (other independent schools are church based) named after the region's Dreamtime caterpillar. Partially funded by government (federal Dept of Employment Education and Training and the Dept of Community Services) and by the community and friends, it is owned by the community and has a parent controlled school council. It opened in 1978 and was initially opposed by the NT government and the Dept of Education. The school has been a vanguard against assimilation. It struggled for the first 5 years and got by on grants from churches, charities and sponsorships. The school survived in sheds and temporary buildings spread over 5 camps with few resources. European teachers worked for $50 per week and trained Aboriginal people to be teachers. The pedagogy and the curriculum is bicultural. It begins with building "a strong primary identity in the child's first culture... (and) emphasis... on achieving fluency in the native language" (Scott quoted in Richards, 1984). One day per week the school went into the bush "classroom" for traditional teaching. The school was finally registered by the NT Dept of Education in 1983. In 1990 the school moved into new buildings in Alice Springs. Although only the Director, childcare staff and the School Council are Aboriginal, the school is committed to the "Aboriginalisation" of all teaching positions.

A parent co-operative childcare programme has been set up to help introduce children and their parents to the school culture. Children attend morning sessions, and have lunch provided by the school. It is moving from a classroom location into a purpose built centre during 1992. The programme caters for children with the 5 regional languages-Western and Central Arrente, Luritja, Pitjantjatjara and Warlpiri- and English. The supervisor speaks one Aboriginal language and understands the others. Most children have English as their second, third or fourth language. After "transition" to the school Harris's "Two-way" model is used. The childcare supervisor is untrained as are the staff and parent helpers("aunties" and "nannies") The supervisor begins a 6 months TAFE course during 1992. The childcare programme has been devised by the Deputy Principal, who is not early childhood trained, and the day-to-day operation is the supervisor's responsibility. The Deputy Principal reported that a pre-school programme is to be set up to provide for a more appropriate (sic) preparation for school. Children will move on from the childcare to the new pre-school and then onto the primary school. There were 23 children at the session when I visited although about 16 is the average attendance. The programme was highly structured, activity based and with a fixed time for outdoors play. Natural materials were in use.The Deputy Principal assured me that teaching in the pre-school would be "more formal" !!

Barunga pre-school is in the primary school at the Barunga Community Education Centre (CEC). This is a small "Community" some 80 km south of Katherine. The CEC caters for children from age 2 to 15 (year 10). There are 31 children on the roll aged from 2 to 7 years with up to 20 attending the sessions. Some travel in from long distance from a vast area to attend the school. Their native languages are various. As a "community" they use Kriol as the lingua franca for instruction in the school.

They have a "brekfistaim" (breakfast-time) program, and a highly structured session programme which includes "pleiplei insaid" and "autsaid" (inside and outsaid play), "smoko" and "ola kid sidan la mat" (mat-time). During my visit girls and boys were often managed in separate groupings, e.g. in lining up for hand washing and while waiting to move of to the next activity. There were cut-outs at the dough table and stencils at the drawing table. There was teacher direction of activities and every 10-15 minutes children were directed to change activities. I could not identify anything distinctively non-European in the curriculum and the materials in use except for the occasional use of Kriol.

The pre-school area leader (supervisor) was an Aboriginal women trained in the Batchelor College 3 year primary programme. The only other Aboriginal staff in the school were teacher aides. None of the non-Aboriginal teachers speak Kriol. The male senior teacher of the primary school-my contact and host- appeared to assume total responsibility and control over the pre-school. He was clearly very involved in the planning and implementation of the programme. The Aboriginal teacher and aides (females) operated under his (white male) influence. Although I had asked to observe the programme in the least obtrusive manner he accompanied me during the whole of my visit and only excused himself for brief periods to attend to supervision of other urgent tasks. At the end of the session when I tried to talk with the Aboriginal teacher he intervened and frequently answered my questions on her behalf. She did not assert herself, which may not have been appropriate behaviour, and he appeared to be unaware of his overbearing and controlling behaviour.

The Batchelor College childcare centre and kindergarten, 90 km soth of Darwin, caters mainly for the children of college staff and students. Both were purpose built. Children attending the childcare centre are from 1 to 5 years , and from 3 to 5 years in the kindergarten. A small number of places are reserved for non-Aboriginal children.The chidcare centre is funded by the federal government's Multifunctional Aboriginal Childrens' Service (MACS) scheme which also funds family day care and out of school care programmes. The kindergarten is state Dept of Education funded. The supervisor and staff of the childcare centre and the teachers of the kindergarten (some Aboriginal and some non-Aboriginal) are all EC trained. They have also been chosen for their knowledge of the region's native languages of which there are 5. During my visits the white Australian childcare supervisor was the only non-Aboriginal staff member I observed talking to a child using Aboriginal language. The programmes appeared to provide a wide choice of experiences in a warm caring environment.

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